CHAPTER THREE
SUBALTERN PEOPLES OF THE BIBLE

PART ONE: SITZ IM LEBEN OF THE SUBALTERN PEOPLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

3.0. INTRODUCTION

This third chapter will serve as a background material to the following chapters which becomes necessary in the light of the theme of the thesis, namely to find answers to the problem we have just stated in the second chapter. All weaker sections of society can find solace in the Bible. The God of the Bible pledges to be the God of the suffering peoples. Right from the beginning of salvation history, Israel, God's chosen people, has been a special and minority group among the nations of the world. Israel thus stands as one of the subaltern groups of human society. The Jewish people have gone through, as Max Weber notes: "as one unit, an experience of marginalized, (subaltern peoples) and alienated. This means, they were a guest people who were ritually separated, formally or de facto, from their social surroundings."1 The liberation and salvation that the God of Israel granted to her becomes a model and sense of hope for all the subaltern peoples of any society. It is this presentation of hope in the Bible that becomes source of comfort to the subaltern peoples of Andhra Pradesh whose miserable conditions we have listed in the previous chapter.

3.1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC-POLITICAL-CULTURAL-RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Bible presupposes, rather than describes, the social situation of the lower strata of society, at each period of Jewish history. It is perhaps for this reason that it

does not show direct and explicit interest in the social situation of its society.² It is a fact, that one situation, e.g. social, is the result of the influence of the other, e.g. religious or political situations. Hence it is essential to study the socio-economic and other situations, in order to understand the Sitz im Leben of the subaltern peoples of the Old Testament, before we go into the actual study of the plight of the subaltern peoples in the Bible.

3.1.1. JEWS AS A PEOPLE

Ethnic identity of the Jewish people marked every aspect of their life. Israel was both, a nation and a religion. Jewish People were called as Hebrews, Jews or Israel.³ The word 'Hebrew' in the Bible, was related to a man named Eber, who was Shem's great-grandson.⁴ It was derived from abar meaning 'to cross over'.⁵ The Hebrew, then, was "he who crosses over" or "the man of great wanderings".⁶ The word 'Israel', relates to Jacob, the Patriarch of Jewish people. The struggle that Jacob went through in the extraordinary night (Gen. 32:29) became the spiritual struggle of his people over centuries. Israel also means a fighting man. Israel (Jacob) fought for himself and for his


³. The title or name of "Jews" has different origins. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were called 'Hebrews' when they were in Egypt and were called as 'Israel' when referred to the groups of twelve confederations and also during the times of monarchies. During and after the Second Temple they were called as 'Jews'. These various names ultimately refer to the same group of People, People of Yahweh, the chosen People. However, the differences show the historical developments of the People.


⁵. A root that was found again in Mesopotamia as habiru and in Egypt as apiru, was used for the marauders who came from the Steppes.

⁶. It suggests the great journeys from Ur to Canaan in the days of Abraham, from the country of Nile to that of the Jordan in the days of Moses.

56
descendants. To be an Israelite was to be one nation that stood face to face with God. The term "Jew", found only in the two books of Maccabees and in the New Testament, Semitic meaning. It dates from the time of Israel's return from exile.

For the Jews, as a people, in fact, it is their common history that welded them together. The Jewish people are conscious of being chosen from among every nation on earth by a personal and historically potent act of God:

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession (Deut. 7:6).

The Jews are conscious that in this election there is a goal, namely, salvation to themselves and to all nations: "..by you all families of the earth shall bless themselves." (Gen. 12:3ff.). The highlights of this historically potent divine action concretely began with the call of Abraham. As Werner Forster describes:

"First, the basic event of Abraham's call, was God's covenant with Him and the circumcision given as a token of the covenant. Second, the deliverance from the "furnace of Egypt," and the making of the covenant at Sinai, in which the will of God was made known to the people in laws and they swore obedience (Exod. 24:3). Third, the construction of Temple in Jerusalem, which then became the only shrine of worship and sacrifice."

8. Ibid., pp. 42-43.
9. The chief tribe whose members had been deported by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon was Judah.

But the particularity of this group began to erode when the non-Jews entered into their fold as early as during the time of the Patriarchs itself. The fundamental condition that is insisted upon for the inclusion of any non-Jew was the rite of 'circumcision'. The proselytes (converts) thus joined Jews. To a large extent it was this religious rigour that made the Jews an exclusive people. But this exclusivism often cut them off from rest of the world.  

3.1.2. SOCIAL STRUCTURES OF JEWISH SOCIETY

Jewish people's social exclusiveness became social inclusiveness. The structural boundaries that they built around themselves were made to crumble and became very vulnerable. Inspite of these drawbacks the Jewish people managed to keep up their unique religious faith, that helped them to relate to others.

Jews were nomadic people in the beginning (Gen 13:3f., 18:1;f, 31:25, 33f., 32:1). They learned occupation through settlements and were known for cattle keeping occupation. Once the nomadic life gave way for settlements they developed social structures, namely settled life. But the transition to a settled peasant status was fluid. They could not own land. Their social structures fluctuated. The settlements became possible as and where they found a water source. This gave rise to a new occupation, namely, agriculture. The wandering people became inhabitants. But these places with water sources often were objects of frequent conflicts (Gen. 26:20f.; 21:25; Exod. 2:17f.) among themselves and with their neighbours. These conflicts made them vulnerable.

The new socio-economic conditions brought much improvement in the life conditions of the people but at the same time they brought some worries to society. The


wealth and power began to rest in the hands of some individuals or families. The ethnic composition due to invasion of foreign groups changed to the disadvantage of Israel's ancient homogeneity. Growth of commerce and communication brought new ethical values. This gave rise to the violation of old social norms (Exod. 22:25). Rich land-owners became oppressors of the poor. They made loans to simple farmers and demanded interest so high that the farmers could not repay the debt. The poor borrower became the slave of the lender:

The rich rules over the poor and the borrower is the slave of the lender
(Prov. 22:7).

The dependence created by debt led to the pawning of possession or the sale of land. Thus a few became rich and the majority poor (Is. 5:8; Mic. 2:2; Ezek. 47:14). The poor who were few in number became many. The loss of social position brought with it also a loss of legal rights (Exod. 23:3).14

Family system was an integral part of the larger social system of Jewish society. There was the fear of solitariness for those who estranged themselves from their families.15 Any one who was not connected with the family was considered a stranger. The family owned the responsibility of providing security to the individual. The family ties were linked to the covenantal relationship with their God. It was by belonging to a family that an individual could claim membership of the covenant people, whether by birth or by residence (as in the case of slaves or resident aliens).16 Family represented the embodiment of socio-economic and religious context of individuals and community members. It is worth noting that no prophet accused the family system of being cause of


social degradation in Israel. Rather they condemned those, whose greed, oppression and injustices (Neh. 5:4f.) had destroyed families.17

The life of an individual in ancient Israel was always firmly integrated in the bonds of one’s family. The individual was one who was called and chosen (Gen. 12:1) as all the patriarchs of Israel were. The clans were united in the tribe. The community of all tribes was called 'Israel' or 'the house of Israel'.18 As People of Yahweh, it formed a unity (Josh. 24:9f., 31; Judg. 5:11; 2 Sam. 1:12). The unity between the individuals and the community served well to protect the family and its members from any threats. These communities, in the course of time, became congregations of a religious nature (Joel 1:2). The history of the individual coincided completely with the history of whole of God’s people: in the changes experienced, in the troubles endured and in the benefits enjoyed.19 Any individual who went against the family or society rule was expelled from the society:

As for anyone who presumes to disobey the priest appointed to minister there to the Lord your God, or the judge, that person shall die. So you shall purge the evil from Israel (Deut. 17:12. See also 19:19; 22:22).

The expulsion brought loneliness, (meaning segregation) to the persons (Ps. 25:2,19). Segregation meant complete abandonment. Segregation applied to people with unclean diseases (Lev. 13:46). Such individuals became subaltern peoples.

3.1.3. PLACE OF THE LAND IN JEWISH SOCIETY

Land was a factor of great historical and theological significance for the life and faith of Jewish people. On the one hand, it was the primary source of economic wealth


and provided the basis for the prosperity of individual families and of the nation as a whole. On the other hand, it was imbued with a profound theological significance and became a visible sign of the abiding relationship which existed between Yahweh and his people. Land played a crucial role in both the judgement and salvation of Jewish people:

They (Israel) did not say, 'Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives? I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination

(Jer. 2: 6-7. see also 3:9; 4:5; 6:1).

Return to the land after the exile was seen as renewing the covenant. Israelites lost land only when they were unfaithful and disloyal to Yahweh (Amos 2:10, 13-16; 7:17). When they went astray they were deported from the land (Hos. 2:14f.). We should point our here that land had become Israel’s possession, not from Abraham’s inheritance, or from his ancestors, but one which was granted as Yahweh’s precious gift (Gen. 12:1-3,7). The gift of land was not because of Israel’s righteousness (Deut. 9:4f.). Rather it was a token of the fact that God was acting to fulfill his promises to the Patriarchs (Deut. 6:23; 9:5). The loss of land made the farmers into a landless labourers (Lev. 19:13; 25:39f.; Deut. 24:14) or even slaves to the creditor (2 Kgs. 4:1; Amos 2:6).

Right to property gave a sense of wholeness to the psychological totality of a Jew, as to any human person. At the same time this new system assured the social position of the free individual (Mic. 2:2). The settlement had brought a new outlook in the

---


relations between families and outsiders. Attention was given to relations with the neighbours. This attention gradually became stronger and eventually the territorial context was superimposed or even suppressed the clan structure.\textsuperscript{23} The agrarian laws of the Jews gave much attention to the protection of the poor who did not own property. The regulations concerning the Sabbath year, the Jubilee year and the laws affecting the land were aimed at helping the landless poor.\textsuperscript{24} The Jews were commanded to leave a 'Peah'\textsuperscript{25} of grain to the landless poor. It was similar to 'Gleanings':

\begin{quote}
When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the lord your God (Lev. 23:22).
\end{quote}

The fact that these regulations were given to protect the poor, would suggest that the poor were neglected. The interpreters of the law did not practice what they pronounced. There were instances of exploitation of the lower classes. Those who exploited the poor from their land were warned of dispossession of land:

\begin{quote}
Alas for those who devise wickedness and evil deeds on the beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in their power. They covet fields, and seize their houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance. Therefore, thus says the Lord: I am devising against this family an evil from which you cannot walk haughtily.
\end{quote}

(Mic. 2:1-5).

\textsuperscript{23} W. H. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 37.


*Peah* literally means 'corner'; a section of the field, in which the owner is required to leave part of his crop unreaped for the benefit of the poor.
A person's ownership of property was extinguished when he/she no longer had permanent possession of the property. But the acts of extinguishing (transfer or removal of right) were manipulated. For the purpose of debt recovery the land was divided into: best, medium and poor quality. A claim arising from tort was recovered from land of the best quality, the creditors' claim from the medium and the wife's ownership of ketubbah (marriage contract) from the poor quality.

3.1.4. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The nomadic Jewish society transformed itself into an agrarian society. This development gave rise to social system that developed its own economic class divisions. The economic classes can be classified into two major groups. They are: upper classes and lower classes. The upper classes included: the ruler, the governing class, retainer class, merchants and priestly class.

The lower classes included: peasants, artisans, an unclean or degraded class and expandable class. The peasants groups were heavily taxed and kept firmly under control. The artisan class, another one, always remained unnoticed. They earned when they produced something with their skills. Their low productivity and dependence on the upper classes made them vulnerable. The unclean class, did not do the noxious (harmful), but necessary tasks such as tanning. They were prone to injuries, and lived in unhygienic conditions of life and in unhealthy surroundings. The expandable group consisted of those who had no place in the society. A large section of the population (poor) lived chiefly or


entirely on charity and relief. Some of the poor were landless and itinerant with no normal family life and with a high death rate.

The cultures of the classical world were based on a tradition that was older than money which later came to be the measuring stick of economy. Similarly the divisions between the rich and poor were also so old. The wealthy rich class formed a small percentage. The extravagant life of the wealthy was at the expense of the poor. The wealthy minority tried to force the peasants to produce surplus which in turn was taken back from them by burdensome taxes. They lived totally a different life from the rest of the people. Several members of the Sanhaderin and the priestly aristocracy came from this wealthy class. The middle class, consisting of priests and bureaucrats lived on the tithes, and offerings from the people.

The poor class constituted a majority of the population. Among these, a great percentage worked as day labourers. Labourers were hired only by each day but there were many days when there was no work. Their daily wages often did not allow them to buy more than the required bread for the family. The burden of civil and religious obligations was undoubtedly heavy. Often the collection was forced by citing religious rules. One might argue that in spite of such general economic conditions, the situation

30. Ibid, p. 44.
of Palestine was not that bad. But the situation of the poor subaltern groups was not only bad but even deplorable. The economic conditions of Palestine were marked by a sharp rise in prosperity in the Hasmonean period, and a decline in the middle of first century BC, due to civil wars, and the Roman intervention with its financial burden. Roman rule introduced decentralization to increase the contribution to the treasury.

A number of institutions were proposed by Israelite Law to alleviate economic imbalances among social classes. A broad institution called 'poverty tithe' was introduced. This consisted of: the three-year tithe, the fallow year, the Sabbath year release, and the Jubilee year. The creditor was advised to 'release' (in the Jubilee year) the debtor as well as the debt. The assumption of the law was that the borrower was poor and was unable to pay back (Exod. 22:25, Deut.23:19-20; Lev. 25:35-38). These laws were designed to redistribute wealth in order to promote economic harmony in the land of Israel (Deut. 26:12). This indicates a strong concern for human need. People are more important than properties.

3.1.4.1. POVERTY AND PEASANT MOBILIZATION

The fall out of the poor economic conditions was the result of poverty. Poverty was one of the constant and painful reality that marked the history of Israel. Poverty manifested itself in dependence, humiliation and oppression. The Old Testament speaks

37. Who came after Maccabean rule. They consolidated the Palestine into strong nation. They built cities and destroyed other cities that have over expanded. Palestine went through relatively peaceful times during these times. See Joseph Sievers, The Hasmoneans and Their Supporters: From Matathias to The Death of John Hyrcanus I, Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1990, pp. 27f.


more of the conditions of the poor rather than of poverty. But both are interrelated. The expressions referred to the poor are: deprived, needy, mistaken, dependent, submissive and indigent. Poverty was a situation of begging or dependence.42 For Jews, the existence of poverty was a scandal, a breach of the covenant. Israel was always aware of the presence of the poor in society. Segregation from society too was an experience of poverty.

The intensity of economic poverty was such, that as early as in the times of Moses, rules were formulated to help the weak. They include the protection of: the slaves (Exod. 21:1-11; 23:9,12); the resident alien (22:20); the widow and the orphan (22:21); the poor borrower (22:24). The existence of poverty suggests the existence of wealth. The eighth century prophets were specially harsh on the rich who lived in luxuries (Amos 3:12,15, 4:1, 5:11, 6:4-7; Hos. 7:5, 8:14, 10:1 and Is. 2:7, 13-16, 3:16-24, 5:8-12, 32:13-14). The rich were accused for the crushing yoke with which they had weighed down the poor.

The rise of poverty gave place to growing tensions and clashes.43 The economic results of the political crisis were: confiscation, forced labour, new taxes and abuses.44 Taxes were applied to men, houses, animals, sales, imports and exports. Besides these taxes, the Jews had to pay dues to another sovereignty as well, that was imposed by the ancestral faith. Even though the priests had ceased to rule, they still continued to collect their dues. Thus the burden of double taxation (civil and religious) had weakened and

---


disrupted normal life and economic growth was impeded. The pressing economic issues and the problem of debt grew to chronic proportion.

There were circumstantial factors that aggravated the poverty in the Jewish society. The return from exile resulted in further miseries for the poor as austere measures were implemented to raise the economic conditions of the nation. Occupation of the land by foreign rulers too added to the intensity of poverty. Israel’s profane wisdom attributed poverty to a number of factors: to laziness (Prov. 6:6-11, 10:4, 20:4,13, 24:30-34), to idle talk (14:23), to idle pursuits (28:19), to the seeking of pleasure (21:17; 23:20-21; Sir. 18:32-19:2). These arguments seemed to come certainly from a non-poor (rich) man’s observation. Riches are a blessing in the Old Testament (Gen. 13:2; 24:35), and a gift from God (1 Kgs. 3:13). Is poverty too, as riches, the sanction from God? The prayer of every Jew is a supplication to be relieved from poverty. Social obligations were introduced to remove poverty with rules like: duty of giving assistance to the poor, the widow, and the orphan (Exod. 21:1-11,26-27, 22:20-30, 22:24. 23:6,11). Concern for the poor can be found even in Holiness Code (Lev. 19:9-10,13, 23:22; Pss. 41:2, 82:3-4, 109:16, 112:9).

Poverty was identified with the peasant group as they were the worst affected people. Peasants always provided a handy means of labour. The peasants of Israel, in early times, usually lived outside all city organizations. The suffering of the peasants was such in Jewish society, that Prophet Amos mobilized rebellion against King Jeroboam who was unwilling to carry on social reforms. Prophet Amos saw a definite war between wealth and poverty, townsmen and peasants:

47. Ibid, pp. 10-12.
Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory
and stretch themselves upon their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock
and calves from the midst of the stall;
..you trample upon the poor
and take from him exactions of wheat,
you have built houses of hewn stone...
you have planted pleasant vineyards...

(Amos 6:4; and 5:11).

Rebellion brought some comfort to the peasants. Reforms proposed a general remission or reduction of peasant debt or restriction of debt bondage. This concern of the prophets shows that Bible is full of concern for the sufferings of the poor. But it is surprising to note that many of the biblical scholars have over looked poverty until the middle of this present century.50

The peasant poverty was seen in "peasant-land-lord" relationship. But this again worked on: patronage, partnership and exploitation. This character of peasant-ownership gave sanctions to maintain silence on the peasant poverty. The rich came to the position of "buying the poor as easily (with silver i.e., debts of money) as they bought a pair of sandals (8:6). As a result, many of the poor people became slaves. The kinsmen of these slaves could not buy them back as they too were helpless.51

50. Lang argues that the main reason why the earlier scholars did not react to the Peasant poverty was perhaps because they were obsessed with existing social system as an approved one. When the prophets like Amos made social criticism and reread, the problem was perceived and accepted. The egoistic exploitation gave place to the patron solidarity. The rich had softened the harshness of poverty through well directed (their own) measures to create some kind of social balance. Peasant poverty did not come across as a problem to the scholars perhaps because they characterized Peasants into three traits. They were: 1. A peasant was not a farmer or an agricultural entrepreneur but rather one who maintains a household, which is the basic economic unit. 2. Peasants do not form a complete and independent society. 3. The ruling class makes permanent charges on the agricultural production, through patrimonial system or prebendal (part of the revenue was meant as stipend to a priest) system. see also Robert Redfield, Peasant Society and Culture, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1956, pp. 35-66.

51. Ibid, pp. 95-96.
3.1.5. SOCIAL MORALITY

The Jewish society known for its purity, religiosity and homogeneous culture, has disintegrated eventually on many issues. The morality took a back seat. A number of factors added to the social and moral degradation. Some of them were: break-ups of the family ties, impoverishment of the masses, the accumulation of colossal wealth in the hands of a few, a virtual disappearance of the middle classes, a vast growth of the slave population, the devastation of the rural areas and the drift of population to the cities, where they were increasingly subjected to every kind of degrading social influence. In such situations it was always the lower groups of the society who were affected. The impact of social and moral degradation was first seen among the subaltern peoples.

The wealthy Pharisees, Sadducees, Priestly families, etc., pretended to live a 'righteous' life and preferred to sit on the judgement seat to despise the rest of humanity. It was this dishonesty that prophet Amos condemned:

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, 'bring something to drink!' The Lord God has sworn by his holiness: The time is surely coming upon you when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fish-hooks... (4:1-2).

The Jewish religion which was built on exclusive religious values had a binding norm on social life. But religious rules were taken seriously and not the spirit of the rules.


3.1.6. POLITICAL CONDITIONS

The Jewish political history had always been a turbulent one. It took long time to shape itself. It was only after the Davidic rule that a clear political system emerged. Though Israel was a small nation compared to her neighbours, she was never united. It was an easy chance for her enemy to fragment her further. The people of Israel were made to shift their loyalty from one to another, like the Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians and Romans. Jews were scattered due to this fragmentation. Many Jews lived elsewhere in Samaria, Galilee, the coastal region, Transjordan, Babylon, Egypt and further afield.\textsuperscript{54}

The number of invasions, added to the internal fights, divided Israel into separate kingdoms. The worst destruction was of Jerusalem and its Temple. Due to the invasions there were number of deportees (Jer. 52:28-30). Those who stayed behind were called "the poor of the land" (2 kgs. 24:14; 25:12). There was always a conflict between the two groups, the deportees who came back after their deportation was over and the 'poor of the land'. The poor of the land were permitted to take over the holdings and estates of the deportees (Jer. 39:11) in the interest of maintaining the economy of the province. The new owners justified the expropriation on the grounds that the deportee had, in effect, been expelled from Yahwehistic cult community and had therefore forfeited his right to property (Ezek. 11:15-16).

The Jewish political will was manifest in their attempts to rebuild the destroyed Temple. At the same time there was a lot of turmoil in the land due to revolts and rebellions (Ezra 4:6). The attempts to suppress the revolts by the rulers brought more economical hardships. The composition of the population itself was a mixture. The influx of outsiders too was a constant worry. The destruction of Jerusalem and most of the

larger towns was a big loss to the skilled artisan class. This resulted in a decrease in productivity which was due to the disappearance or take over of the larger holdings and estates. Thus the political turmoil and changes had their consequences on social and economic organization.

The High Priests in Jewish society commanded a significant place in the political arena. Priests were members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council. Besides priests, the groups which exercised political power were: the Sadducees (Jewish aristocracy), the Pharisees (members of urban lower middle class: artisans, small traders and scribes) and the Zealots (who opted for a solution based on guerilla warfare against the Romans). The last group was mostly concerned with anti-Roman activities. The Romans reacted in a violent manner towards this and similar movements. This resulted in more political unrest.

In the political conditions we must also mention the internal fights of Israel in the later times of the Old Testament. The various groups and sects contributed their share to the prevailing confusion caused by foreign rule. The decline of the Roman empire at later times, had brought self-confidence among the Jews. But even this also lead to political crisis. The hated tax-collectors were the first victims of popular fury. In this political revolt, much of the property of the citizens was lost. But there was another side to the political turmoil. It was the continual fight between the Jews and the Samaritans. This age old tension between the two became more acute during the times of Jesus.

---


Political conditions in Palestine in the times of Jesus were no different. The foreign rulers looked at the natives with suspicion and the natives looked at the foreign rulers as intruders. The fight against the evil (e.g. Roman) presence was carried on by different people's movements. Roman rulers always treated the local citizens as barbarians.\textsuperscript{58} The attitude of the rulers towards these barbarians was one of repression and suppression. The Roman governors nominated procurators (the trusted native persons) who exercised a lot of power. They wielded not only political and economic power but even religious power.\textsuperscript{59} In these conditions the subaltern peoples were the much affected ones.

3.1.7. CULTURAL CONDITIONS

Jewish society which boasted of mono-culture, had became a society of poly cultures. It was a situation not only of a mixture of various cultures, but there existed conflicting cultures. Culture for the Jews was always a symbol of national identity. But when culture lost its originality, its very identity was lost. There were three main types of cultures that prevailed in Palestine in the times of Jesus: Judaism, Hellenism and Roman Imperialism.\textsuperscript{60} We should also note here that Jewish culture was already polluted during monarchic period, before and after the Exiles.

When we talk of the cultural context of Palestine we should mention the Hellenistic culture that dominated the last few centuries that preceded the times of Jesus. Hellenistic culture was the offshoot of Greek culture. Greek culture was influential in Palestine in several ways, perhaps most pervasively in religious worship.\textsuperscript{61} It had


\textsuperscript{60}. Ibid, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{61}. John Stambaugh and David Blach, op. cit., p. 88.
introduced several shrines, theaters and amphitheaters, and various kinds of games. Many of the Palestinians were taken up by this new culture. But after a certain period of time, the Greco-Hellenistic culture began to make inroads into the Jewish culture. It had touched the sensitive aspect of the Jewish Torah, especially, the second commandment (Deut. 4:15-19, 5:8) which forbade the worship of images of humans and animals. This naturally created tensions among the Jews themselves: between those who were tolerant towards other cultures and others who opposed the invasion of foreign cultures and also between the Jews and the foreigners.

3.1.8. RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS

Jewish society has its own distinct religious history. But once the religious rigour faded it brought doom to their lives. Religion was one of the areas into which the Roman rulers, who occupied Jewish land during a few centuries before Christ, did not evince much interest. But once they started to enter into Jewish religious affairs such as the Temple, a sacred place for the Jews, the Jewish people revolted. One such example was the revolt in 41 C.E. When the Romans tried to put an image of the emperor in the temple, a pagan custom, and the Torah scrolls were profaned, the anger of the Jews was immense. Some foreign rulers directly touched upon Jewish religious practices. There were persecutions and repressive decrees, not only against the practice of the Torah, but also against the Jews as a nation. Human beings, the world over, are born into systems of lines that mark off, delimit and define nearly all significant human

62. Ibid, p. 89.


64. Some of the Torah laws included: Sabbath observances, Circumcision, and Purity laws.

These markings always are attached with feeling and value. Social lines are quite necessary to perceive the set-apartness if perceived in proper sense but not when used to discriminate against another. This creates anomalies and abominations in interpersonal dealings and relations.

3.1.8.1. PURITY AND HOLINESS - DISCRIMINATION AGAINST POOR

The inscribed norm in every heart of the Jew was to be holy. It was on this ground that they were saved at the moment of drowning in the Red Sea (Exod. 19:5f). This religious norm had bound the Jewish people as one nation. The ones who did not adhere to this practice were looked down upon and were condemned. People are deemed to be incapable of receiving the blessings transmitted by the covenant with God when they are unholy.

In the times of Jesus, although various interpretations were given to purity rules, they still played important role in society. But often they also led to abuses and hypocrisy. The purity rules created divisions among people. The gulf between the marginal people and the righteous and holy widened. The impure people became marginal as they could not adhere to the rules of purity. The purity rules also were dictated by wealth. The rich would find it comparatively easy to abide by the restrictions of the law, as they had access to the things needed. Thus in the times of Jesus, even the religious justice did not stand on behalf of the marginalized subaltern peoples.

69. They included mostly subaltern peoples: Gentiles, Samaritans, Women, Tax-collectors, Toll-collectors, Usurers, Gamblers, Prostitutes: male and female, Handicapped and Persons engaged in various occupations as they meant sources of uncleanness or because they were suspected of dishonesty.
There were number of groups of people who were condemned as impure and hence, were not part of Jewish society. Gentiles were considered unclean because they worshipped false gods and goddesses. The Samaritans were seen as unclean and idolatrous. Any immoral activity was considered unholy. Women were often victims of this rule. Prostitutes, male and female, were deemed impure because of their occupation. Even the handicapped, eunuchs, (see Is. 56:4-5 and Acts 8:26-40) and diseased persons were considered impure because it was thought that either they or their parents had committed sin (see John 9:1-3). Mental disorders were treated similarly and imputed to demonic possession (Lk 8:26-39).

The visible witness to the realities of this distinction between clean and unclean was the barrier or baluster (separation by pillar) in the temple in Jerusalem. But if we analyse these divisions there is much more than purity aspect to it. It was the division between poverty and riches. The separation was often dictated by wealth:

"The rich find it comparatively easy to abide by the restrictions of law, e.g. in finding sufficient water for purification; in acquiring sufficient utensils to separate meat produce from dairy produce; to replace dishes which were ritually contaminated and to purchase the kosher animals, which were slaughtered and cleaned according to prescribed ritual performed by clean and approved persons".

It was the same situation with the regulation regarding a visit to the temple. Those who visited the temple needed to be pure. It was only the rich, who had economic resources could keep themselves 'pure' (perhaps, for external appearance). The poor, who had to battle for their daily sustenances with all possible means and methods could not

---

70. To this group, was also added the list of Tax-collectors, Toll-collectors, Usurers, Gamblers and the like.


72. Ibid.
afford to keep themselves externally clean always. As a result, the poor appeared and were treated as impure and looked at as 'out-casts'. If the rules of purity were intended to establish holy relations between God and his people, they have, under the banner of maintaining purity relations, distanced the subaltern peoples from their God.

3.1.8.2. ROLE OF JERUSALEM AND THE TEMPLE

Jerusalem, the holy city of Israel, became a religious, cultural and political symbol in the history of the people. It was the metropolis of the Jews. It was the centre of national and inter-national dealings. It came to be considered as royal city with a taste for splendour.\textsuperscript{73} It had rich inhabitants who favoured luxury goods and luxurious life. It included a significant number of wealthy people: both the absentee landlords, great merchants, priests and the small class of Levites. The indispensable artisans, petty traders, large urban wage earners and unskilled labourers filled the crowded streets. The rules of ritual purity resulted in numerous inconveniences for the ordinary people in everyday life.

The importance of Jerusalem Temple extended far beyond the boundaries of the city. The Temple became rich with the offerings of the pilgrims. Jerusalem was the single holy place of the Jews in the world. The practice of going on pilgrimage three times a year brought constant income to the Temple. It maintained its own army of craftsmen and workmen for the purpose of cultus.\textsuperscript{74}

The political importance of the city had both the direct and the indirect effect on trade in particular and life in general. Jerusalem was the abode of all customs and revenue officials. It provided both a place for business transactions and a ready market for trade. The Jerusalemites tended to separate themselves from the Judean provincials

\textsuperscript{73}. Joachim Jeremias, op. cit., p. 28.

\textsuperscript{74}. Ibid, p. 30.
for both social and ritual reasons. The poor were not able to satisfy the demands of the city and the temple. The poor were forced to spend from their income during pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Jerusalem's wealthy people and the temple officialdom profited to the maximum from these pilgrims. Jerusalem was the abode of the presence of God on earth. But looking at the state of affairs of the city and the temple, religiously and politically, in the times of Jesus, neither the Temple nor the city of Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God but were places of power and Mammon. Poor subaltern peoples had no place in Jerusalem nor in the Temple.

3.1.9. REVOLT AGAINST SOCIO-ECONOMIC-POLITICAL DETERIORATION AND NATIONAL MOVEMENTS

When suffering goes to the extent of being unbearable, it will be resented and will force the victim to resort to violence. The subaltern peoples, as a way out, took to violent means to eradicate their suffering. In the backdrop of the prevailing socio-economic-religious and political degrading situation of Jewish society there arose some national movements. These movements were the responses of some Jews to the injustice. The period, a few centuries before Christ, was one of the most violent epochs of Jewish history. The national movements took variety of forms: Social Bandits, Messianic

76. Joachim Jeremias, op. cit., p. 75.
77. We can call these Movements as 'National' because of their national nature. In fact the whole country was up against the oppressive rule of the foreigners and natives. It also could be called 'national' as most of the people participated in it in some way or the other, by giving moral and concrete support. Some of the scholars called them as 'Revolutionary Movements'. See O. Cullmann, Jesus and The Revolutionaries, Harper and Row, New York, 1970. R.A. Horsley and J.S. Hanson, Bandits, Prophets and Messiahs, Winston, New York, 1985. D. M. Rhoads, Israel in Revolution 6-74 C.E., Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1976.
pretenders, Revolutionary prophets, Apocalypticists, Zealots, Sicarii, \textsuperscript{79} Essenes, Robbers, \textsuperscript{80} and Bar Kokbha Revolt, etc. \textsuperscript{81} Among the above mentioned movements, Social Bandits, the Zealots, the Sicarii and the Essenes were prominent for their direct influence and contribution toward the freedom of the country.

3.1.9.1. THE BANDITRY

One of the national movements was banditry. Social bandits emerged in Israel from incidents and circumstances in which what was dictated by the state or local rulers was felt to be unjust or intolerable. \textsuperscript{82} One of the main reason for the revolt of banditry to start was peasant unrest. The Peasant unrest created a social crisis already at the beginning of the second half of the fifth century BC (Neh. 3; 5:1-5,7). \textsuperscript{83} The foreign rule was felt as illegitimate. \textsuperscript{84} The tribute to the king was seen as robbery and outright slavery. Any foreign ruler's conquest meant more taxation of Jewish peasants. Even the reign of national rulers like Herod did not change the plight of the subaltern groups of Jewish society. The debt burden of Jewish peasants reached to disproportionate level.

When the situation of economic and social state of life of the Jewish peasants in particular and the poor in general was grim there was not much option left but to revolt. Thus social banditry came to forefront. Suppression of bandit leaders was carried on. If banditry rose because of pathetic socio-economic conditions, bandits found support not

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{81} H. Jagersma, op. cit., p. 105f.

\textsuperscript{82} W. M. David Stanley, op. cit., p. 49.


\textsuperscript{84} W. M. David Stanley, op. cit., p. 56.
only from poverty stricken subaltern peoples but also from other sections of Jewish society. The banditry upsurge made the opposed wealthy to flee to safer surroundings leaving the land. Brigands and cave-dwelling brigands too joined hands with the bandits. The bandits formed alliances with other rebellious elements. Therefore there was much anarchy. In this situation bandits created a sense of hope among the people by fighting against the foreign rule and injustices.

3.1.9.2. THE ZEALOTS

Dissatisfaction with political conditions characterized all the Jews, except perhaps, the Sadducees and the Herodians who were socially better off. This dissatisfaction gave rise to popular unrest. One such unrest was started by another group, namely, the Zealots. The name “Zealot” comes from Greek word ‘Zelotes’ which means "the zealous".

The Zealot movement was of an extremist nature. It must have been started in the beginning, primarily as a religious movement but would have acquired later on a ‘nationalist dimension’. It also acquired a social dimension when it was spread throughout the country. The Zealots were the finest patriots. They wanted to "hasten the end" (foreign rule). They wanted to rid Israel of the "ungodly" Roman emperor. They were committed to the fundamental principle that God was the sole ruler of the Holy Land, and that the Jews had only one master. Thus they could never reconcile themselves to foreign domination. Hence they were a despised group and were subjected

85 Namely, from those who were opposed to foreign rule in Palestine.

86. G. H. C. Macgregor, op. cit., p. 118.


88. Werner Forster, op. cit., p. 164.


89. Irving M. Zeitlin, op. cit., p. 31.
to repressive measures by the government and consequently suffered hardships and sufferings.

The Zealots opposed the Pharisees as they were inconsistent in their principles and the observance of the law. They instigated the peasants not to pay taxes to the foreign rulers. They looted the houses of the wealthy, murdered their owners and set the villages on fire. They agitated against the religious aristocracy. They attacked some Herodian nobles. Thus they waged a class war. Fortified with apocalyptic notions of the imminent arrival of the Davidic Messiah, they were eager to fight. Their ideology was based on the need to purify the land of foreign defilement, even by violent means. Thus the very name of the group “Zealots” suggests their purpose. They were zealous for a ‘just’ cause.

3.1.9.3. THE ESSENES

The Essenes was a Jewish sect, known to have flourished from the half of the Second century B.C. to the time of the Jewish revolt against Rome. The word "Essenes" means 'holiness, sanctity or pious'. There were different opinions regarding their habitation. Some certify that they operated around north western shore of the Dead Sea

---

90. Ibid, p. 36.
91. The religious aristocracy includes the priestly class and religious leaders.
They lived a community life, in the pattern of monastic structure, with enormous number of rules. The Essenes claimed to be true heirs of all the promises and called themselves sons of Light. The Essenes' theology resembled that of the Pharisees. They remained celibates and were charitable towards the poor and adopted the children of others. They did agricultural works. They taught and practiced a universal priesthood. They opposed the temple priesthood, which they considered corrupt beyond redemption. There were tensions between the Essenes and the Temple priests and in the end the Essenes were despised. This movement, did not seem to have had any direct influence on the majority of the people. However, this movement had its place in the process of purification of Jewish religious life.

3.1.9.4. THE SICARII

The name taken from Latin word 'sica' means 'curved dagger'. Therefore the name 'Sicarii' had stemmed from the weapon Sica. It was like: "dragger resembling the scimitar of the Persians in size but was curved and more like the weapon called sica by the Romans". The word 'Sicarii' also means 'assassin'. Sicarii's principal activity was not armed robbery but murder and political assassination. They decided to strike through a strategy of selective violence against the ruling group.


98. The Essenes withdrew from the defilement of every day life into their own "purified" monastic centres, where emphasis was laid on meticulous ritual purity.


103. Ibid, p. 201.
Terrorism was one of their main strategy. But later on terrorism became the only method of Sicarri to combat the suffering of the crushed people.\footnote{Ibid, p. 203.} terrorism was used as the effective instrument of social mobilization.\footnote{Ibid.} They targeted Jewish aristocracy.\footnote{\textit{W. J. Heard}, op. cit., p. 696.} The Sicarii were not same as the 'Zealots', nor Social Bandits. Unlike the bandits, the Sicarii were an urban group. The Sicarii were learned men. As the learned men, they were much affected by and indignant about the socio-economic conditions of the subaltern peoples of the Jewish society. They operated in the heart of the city and in the temple precincts. They operated in the most public places while continuing their normal lives because of their clandestine manner of assassination. However, they did not flee like ordinary bandits to mountain strongholds.

All the above and other movements had revolved around the idea of liberating the country and the subaltern peoples from oppression. They further anticipated the coming of the Messiah.

3.1.10. PALESTINE IN THE TIMES OF JESUS\footnote{When we talk of the 'times of Jesus' in this section we refer to the times before Jesus and not to the actual time of Jesus. This period could be taken from the period of Maccabees up to the birth of Jesus.}

Though the whole history of the Old Testament would have affected the thinking of Jesus, it was the immediate times before his appearance on to the scene that would have marked his vision for his society. Hence it is worth to spend a few moments to study his immediate world. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a small town of lower Galilee. Nazareth was a Roman occupied city. It was not a politically hot place like Jerusalem. Jesus was very well aware of the socio-political situations of his country. As a male child he too observed the Old Testament Law of making pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the centre
of political and religious activities, at least three times a year (Exod. 23:17; Deut. 16:16; Lk.2:41-51).

During the times of Jesus, the destiny of Palestine was in the hands of Roman rulers. The beginning of Roman domination in the region coincided with the civil war between Pompey and Caesar, an event which involved Palestine only marginally. But it ushered in an unstable period. The Roman officers exploited instability in Palestine for their own ends. At the same time, the country was also ruled by native rulers of Herodian monarchy, who were accountable to the Roman authorities and so their loyalty was to Rome or to the Roman Government and not to the native people. In the actual times of Jesus, Palestine was relatively peaceful and prosperous. But earlier it was marked by wars, revolts, clashes and disturbances.

Palestine in the times of Jesus was much different from the earlier ones. Geographically the country was divided into two distinct regions: Judea and Galilee. The relationship between Judeans and Galileans was always tense. Judeans regarded Galileans as impure. Judah was the main seat of the fanatical pro-Jewish nationalistic movements. The Galileans on the other hand were impetuous and zealous about religion.

108. A. Alberto Soggin, op. cit., p. 345.
111. Michel Avi-Yonah and Zvi Baras, op. cit., p. 194.
112. Palestine, after the Exile (6th cent. BC) was always subjugated by the empires of Persia and Rome. From within, it was dominated by the wealthy land owning classes.
During this time there were also new interpretations of the Law.\textsuperscript{115} The usual religious and social systems of Palestine had failed.\textsuperscript{116} However it was not a complete state of despair. They believed that God would rise and establish a new world. The new ideas and symbols that came into circulation gave indication of what was happening in the history of Israel. The new ideas also gave rise to the expectations of the rise of the Son of Man (Messiah) who was expected to put an end to evil in society and lay the foundation to a new kingdom.

The people were divided from the standpoint of purity and religious observance. The divisions based on purity also affected the employment opportunities. The pure-blooded were preferred to others.\textsuperscript{117} Those who had transgressed the Law in one manner or the other were called "sinners". The so called sinners were denied all networks of reciprocity that came from sharing of the assets.\textsuperscript{118} Persons suffering from certain maladies, particularly the mentally sick and lepers, were regarded as impure. These persons lived on the margin of social life. The poor and the lowly were pushed into poor financial status.\textsuperscript{119} In the times of Jesus there were more poor in Palestine and they had no chances of emigrating.\textsuperscript{120} Out of these poor, many were, deranged and diseased.

There were also other factors which added to the social degradation of Palestinian society. Extension of boundaries of the Jewish state, rapid population increase, Jerusalem's prominence in national and international affairs and economic growth due to the Pax Romana (peace in the Roman empire) had their lasting influence on society.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, pp. 54-64.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid. p. 59.

\textsuperscript{117} J. N. M. Wijngaards, op. cit., p. 131.


\textsuperscript{119} Ibid, p. 54.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
in Palestine. This gave rise to a large class of artisans and merchants. There was fiscal exploitation. In this sense the Palestine Jewry had merely exchanged one oppressive master for another. It gave way to another social structure. The slave system was replaced with free workers. The results of social and economic crisis troubled the proceeding generations to keep community life intact. It was in this deplorable situation of Palestine we could find the Sitz im Leben of the subaltern peoples of the Palestine in the Times of Jesus.

3.1.11. CONCLUSION

The socio-pol-cul-religious conditions of the Jewish society, from the beginning of its salvation history, show that the subaltern peoples of Jewish society were marked by constant pain and suffering. At every turn of the history there was change that affected the life of the people. Some times this had brought advancement towards the modernity and further enhancement of the life conditions of the people. But the lives of the subaltern people went bad to worse. We have taken a waste period of history of the people and made a brief analysis of the situation of the subaltern peoples of the Old Testament. Our intention was not to make a thesis on the socio-economic situations of the peoples of the Bible though it is worth while. While going through the description of the above history of Jewish people we may appear to present, only the dark side of the picture of Jewish society. we acknowledge that we are not ignorant of the glorious history of Jewish people. But as those who are concerned with the marginalization of the majority of the peoples of Jewish society, our concern is the liberation of these people, namely, the subaltern peoples. This understanding is necessary in the study of the plight of the subaltern peoples (various groups) that we do in the next part and in the study of the text later on. Since we have taken a specific option to study the dehumanizing plight of the subaltern peoples our study can not but go in the similar direction.


122. Ibid, p. 263.

PART TWO: SUBALTERN PEOPLES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

3.2.0. INTRODUCTION

After having seen the socio-economic, political and religious backgrounds of the subaltern peoples in the Old Testament we shall now take up some of the individual subaltern groups and study their Sitz im Leben in the light of the theme of the thesis. The pre-understanding of the intended analysis is already made clear. We shall make an attempt to study, the groups of subaltern peoples in the Old Testament, as many as possible, but not exhaustively. It may be difficult to determine the priority or the hierarchy in the list. Nor can we do a detailed study of any of these groups.

The Old Testament was alive to the full acrimony of the antithesis between the ruler and the ruled, the exploiter and the exploited, the rich and the poor, and the advantaged and the disadvantaged. The groups of subaltern people include all those who were: poor, blind, lame, crippled, lepers, hungry, miserable, sinners, prostitutes, widows, orphans, slaves, hired servants, visiting strangers, tax collectors, social outcasts, demoniacs, persecuted, downtrodden, captives, the rabble (ignorant of the law), crowds, little ones, the least and the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

1. Old Testament includes all the suffering peoples into the groups of subaltern people. The list includes groups like: Foundlings, an abandoned baby of unknown parentage; mute; Hermaphedite: a human being or animal that possesses characteristics of both the sexes: or a left handed or left footed person. But Jews themselves, due to their religious adamancy, have divided the whole humanity as privileged and non-privileged. They called themselves as Abrahamites (privileged) and the rest of humanity as Noahides non-privileged. There were seven precepts, from the point of religious law, that distinguished the Abrahamites and Noahides. They were: prohibition of idolatry, blasphemy, bloodshed, incest, robbery, a limb served from a living creature and the command to set up law courts (see Gen. 34:13f.) and each of these contained many subdivisions. See Shlomo Josef Zevin, "Ben-Noah", in Encyclopedia Talmudic, Vol. IV., Talmudic Encyclopedia Institute, Jerusalem, 1979, pp. 361-379.


3.2.1. ISRAEL - EXODUS PEOPLE

It is always surprising to note that Israelites who considered themselves as the privileged class vis-a-vis their neighbours, often come across to us as one of the subaltern groups. The Israelites were battered and swayed away number of times to the extent of being labelled as 'non-people' in the midst of their neighbours.

"Israel" was the collective name of the twelve tribes that descended from Jacob, whose name became "Israel". The word 'Israel' literally means "God strives" or "God struggles" (Gen. 32:22-32; 35: 10f). The term 'Israel' coming from the root 'srh' also suggests "struggle or strive". It represents a people. It was not only a name of the tribe but it was a sacred name, a name of the covenant people. The covenant people formed the community of Israel (Exod. 12:3-6). It was under this title that God addressed this (His) people. "Israel" was not a mere ethnic term or primarily a territorial reference but the name of a tribal ancestor which was used to designate a decentralized tribal association. Israel was not only just a state but also a community whose character and ethos was determined by the revelation of God. If this was one side of the history of Israel on the other side was the experience of abandonment and suffering.

The Israelites suffered humiliations under the Egyptians (Exod. 6:7) and later under other empires. The Exodus experience for the people of Israel in Egypt was a class struggle, between the rich and the poor. The Israelites were slaves (Deut. 5:15; 6:12; 24:18,22) and the Egyptians were slave owners. The slaves were bitter with hard services, in mortar and brick and in all kinds of works (Exod. 1:14). They were the oppressed class, with complete intimidation, humiliation, forced labour, powerlessness

7. Like Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians and others.
and genocide. They accepted their lowly status as appropriate or inevitable and, believed themselves to be powerless to produce change. In such circumstances, God promised not only deliverance from oppression but also liberation into the Promised Land:

Then the Lord said, I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their task masters. Indeed I know their suffering. And I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...

(Exod. 3: 7-8).

God was always for the people of Israel (Is. 17:6; Jer. 7:3; Ezek. 8:4). But in spite of having God as their rock (Is. 30:29), strength (1:25), king (43:15) and redeemer (44:6), they still became small and weak. It was in this sense that Israel stands as the subaltern peoples. The prophets had to toil to restore some hope in them, especially after their return from exile and during the period of restoration, as a faithful remnant (43:14-44:5) and as "New Israel" (Jer. 30-31). The Exodus event in fact laid foundation for building this New Israel (Exod. 1:8-14; 2:23-25; 3:7-10). The God of the Exodus was aware of the struggles of his people and took sides with the struggling people and invited them to join the struggle for liberation. These Exodus experiences of Israel had enslaved, the whole nation of Israel (Gen. 47:29-31; 48:1-16 also see 24:2) for the generations. Constant exiles and sojourns to foreign land made them to lose their self-confidence.

8. A. Lemaire, op. cit., p. 36.


3.2.2. PEOPLE OF GOD

Different names were used to address the people of Israel. They include: the people of God, the people of Yahweh and the family of Yahweh. These concepts have come into force in various times and contexts but the meaning is the same. Israel and Judah, in broad sense were, designated as the 'People of God'. It was a way in which, according to Semitic notion, Divine and Human beings related to each other. By virtue of election, Israel was the 'People of God'. Israel was God's possession. The word 'people' in biblical context was referred to a socio-cultural designation for the social entity of Israel. It was in contrast to the term 'nation', which was used as a political term.

The consciousness of Israel as People of God was formed in a deep rooted relationship. It was divinely initiated, and has historical and covenantal character:

Now the Lord said to Abraham, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

( Gen. 12: 1-3).

God of Yahweh chose them from all the nations on the face of the earth (Deut. 7:6) hence they also could be called universal people. Israel was called the 'People of Yahweh'

12. They refer to Israel as the people chosen by God himself.


(Judg. 5:11,13; 1 Sam. 2:24). Yahweh was the God of Israel and the only God. Yahweh was distinguished from other gods only by His name. The people of Yahweh meant that these people were under special care of God of Yahweh and hence God had a duty to protect his people, especially when they were in distress. People could rely on him for the very reason that they belonged to him.

'God-people' relation had its mutual obligations, especially towards the marginalized ones among the People of God. The people of God was the beneficiary of the promise of the Covenant. As the people were exploited and oppressed, they cried to Yahweh. The deliverance was pronounced through the prophets. Yahweh made Israelites into his family precisely by freeing them from slavery in Egypt (Exod. 6:7). Yahweh intervened to bring them out from their distress. For, the name Yahweh reminds God's salvific action in history (Is. 3:12-15), and liberator of subaltern peoples.

3.2.3. REMNANT OF ISRAEL

The remnant of Israel were counted as subaltern peoples. "Remnant" was a term used to denote the belief among Israel that the future of Israel would be assured by the faithful remnant, surviving the calamities, that would befall the people as a result of their departing from the way of God. The remnant was that part of the chosen people which was spared after God's chastisement. The Hebrew word "she'ar" translated as 'remnant or rest' meaning 'remainder' or 'the rest', was used of a nation of people who

were remaining after conquest. "Remnant" taken from Greek verb leipo means to leave, leave behind and leave over. It describes the activity of Yahweh in preserving what he had created (Gen. 7:23).

The remnant was an object of threats (Jer. 6:9; 8:3; 24:8; 40-44; 42:15,19; Ezek. 5:10; 2 Kgs. 21:14). But the remnant was also object of the promises. This group constantly received the promises of Messianic restoration. The sacred remnant would be gathered and restored to the land of Israel:

On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people, .......so there shall be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that if left of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt. (Is. 11:11-16. see also Jer.23:3; Mic.2:12; Zech. 8:6f.).

Yahweh will take care of this remnant with special concern and will decorate her with special crown and diadem. Crown signifies royal power (Is. 28:5; Jer. 31:7; Zeph. 3:13 Zech. 8:10-12). The remnant will lean on the Lord, the Holy one of Israel in Truth (IS 10:20-22). Thus this term was completely transformed from implication of defeat to one of messianic hope. Because, this subaltern remnant formed some sort of a bridge between the two moments in the history of the people of God: the moment of promise and foundation, and fulfillment. It represented the eschatological community that was to come. The central element in the life of the remnant is future coming of the messiah (Jer 23:3-6; Mic. 2:12-13; 5:1-8).


Another group among the subaltern peoples of Israel was 'the people of the land'. The Hebrew word or Greek word laos, was used to denote the common people of the land.\(^{25}\) Some times it denoted a generic meaning. It was a social concept used in a pejorative sense. The origin of *am ha arez* did not find a common agreement among the scholars. They were seen as the ordinary inhabitants of the villages and towns who formed a majority in Palestine. They were descendants of the Jews who remained in Judea after the destruction of the first Temple. They were even identified with the Samaritans. In the times of the Second Temple they were known as common people, the masses, who belonged to the lower social strata of small peasants and tenant farmers, labourers, hired workers and 'gleaners'.\(^{26}\) In the post exilic period this term was used for the 'people of the land' who were not of Jewish origin.\(^{27}\) In Biblical Hebrew, the significance of *am ha-arez* varied in accordance with its context. Generally it denoted "population", whether Israelite (2 Kgs. 16:15; 25:3; Ezek. 39:13; 45:22), or non-Israelite (Gen. 42:6; Num. 14:9; Ezra 4:4). In the plural, it denoted 'foreign' population (e.g. of the world at large, Deut. 28:10; 1 Kgs. 8:43f.,) or of a specific country (Esth. 8:17). But more particularly, in post exilic times they were considered as natives, who threatened and harassed the returning Jewish exiles (Ezra 3:3; 9:11; 10:2; Neh. 10.29, 31-32).\(^{28}\) *Am ha-arez* included also publicans and sinners.

Jews saw the group of *am ha-arez* from three aspects: a) in the observance (those who did not) of the commandments, particularly connected with ritual purity, b)


regarding the Torah, for its ignorance, and c) all those who did not support the aims of Pharisaic Judaism. It was used as a collective and individual name. It was a humiliation for any Israelite to be called as 'people' as it meant a lower group in the society. When such a thing happened, it provoked bitter resentment since it alienated the people sociologically from their own land. Added to this there was the contempt of the Pharisees towards am ha-arez and am ha-arez in turn repaid their contempt with smoldering anger and hared. It was a word of contempt and reproach for those whom the Rabbis considered crude, immoral or those who did not observe the law.

In these circumstances we could imagine the animosity that existed between the am ha-arez and others. According to Rabbinic use am ha-arez were not only 'ignorant' of the law but were also incapable of being saints (wise). As for them, only those who learned the law were considered to be wise. This subaltern group was taught, a spiritual solution, to await the days of the Messiah. However, this apocalyptic preaching helped them find solace in the midst of their daily lives of suffering and misfortune.

3.2.5. GALILEAN CROWD

Jews used different titles to denote different groups of people within their own society, with a view to distinguish one from the other. The name “Galilean” though primarily geographic, often carried with it other associations, namely, cultural, social, and religious. The name ‘Galilee’ was derived from the Hebrew word “galil”. It was also used to mean ‘Galilee of Nations’ (Is. 8:23; I Macc. 5:15) in the sense of mixed population.

31. Solomon Zeiltin’s, op. cit., p. 222.
33. Which means “to roll” or “to circle”.

93
There was a periodic mention of Galileans in the Old Testament. They were mentioned in the lists of Jewish sects but no information was given on their distinctive beliefs and practices. They were opposed to the tribe of Judah and the Christ, and also to Roman rule. They were generally known as 'Galilean Crowd'. Galilean population do not belong to the 'pure race' of Israel. Their language was treated as coarse. People hailing from Galilee were also called Galileans. The Judeans referred to Galilee as a district of Gentiles. The Judeans classified the Galileans among the 'am-ha-arez', and "the people of the earth". They forbade their daughters to marry any one from Galilean families. The Jews did not relate well with the Galileans and looked down upon them as enemies. There were tensions between the two. Galileans, some times became rebels and staged revolt. These Galileans as rejected people and looked down upon as subaltern peoples, needed acceptance and due place.

3.2.6. SAMARITANS

The people who lived in Samaria, particularly in the tribal regions of Manasseh and Ephraim and who maintained a unique identity were known as Samaritans. It was an ethnic term for the residents of the district of Samaria. In Jewish literature the Samaritans were called "kuthim" or "men of cuthah", a term designed to stigmatize Samaritans as non-Israelites. There were various theories given for their origin. They came from Mesopotamia as colonists to replace the Jews at the time of exile in Babylon,


and had adopted the worship of Yahweh. They were considered by some Jews as neither fully Gentiles nor fully Jewish.

'Samaritan' itself was a term of contempt among the Jews (John 8:48). The Jews and the Samaritans shared common heritage in certain aspects of religious life. But the Jews were always suspicious about the Samaritans and considered them as foreigners. In Jewish view, the Samaritans had completely deviated from the course of true religion. Jews accused the Samaritans for having brought pagan practices into the Temple. As a religious sect, the Samaritans were a strict Torah-observing people with resolute pride in their religious heritage. After the Exile, the Jews forbade the Samaritans to participate in the reconstruction of the Temple. Samaria was an obstacle between Judea and Galilee. Samaritan presence made it difficult for Herod and the Roman procurators to keep peace. Even for Jews they were an unwanted people in Palestine. Alienation from one's own religion & land was the worst humiliation and thus the Samaritans stand as subaltern groups. Jesus came not to destroy subaltern peoples but to liberate them and to invite them in to the kingdom of God (Lk. 9: 55).

3.2.7. SLAVES

"Slavery is an institution whereby one person could hold ownership rights over another". The Hebrew word for slave was 'ebed'. It meant that a slave was a 'worker or servant'. The meaning of 'slave' differs from 'hired worker'. The word 'slave' was

19. André Trocmé, op. cit., p. 94.


41. Ibid, p. 907.

derived from the verb ‘bd’, meaning "to work". The Hebrew Bible uses the same word for servant and slave.\footnote{Simon Cohen, "Slavery", in The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol.9., Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Co., Inc., New York, 1943, p. 566.}

Jewish society distinguished various classes of slaves. Hebrew slaves, alien slaves, paupers and debtors,\footnote{who were unable to pay back, gave themselves in bondage to their creditors, (Lev.25:39, Prov. 22:7; Is. 50:11 and Amos 2:6; 8:6).} criminals, prisoners of war, female slaves and children of slaves.\footnote{Haim Hermann Cohn, “Slavery”, In Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 14., Encyclopedia Judaica Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 1972, p. 1655.} This meant that there was different treatment of the slaves depending on the category they belonged to. The slaves in Israel were treated largely as residential and domestic workers. However, they were not treated as substitutes for the labour of members of the household.\footnote{Christopher J. H. Wright, Living As The People of God, InterVarsity Press, Leicester, 1983, p. 178.} Perpetual slavery was prohibited in Israel (Exod. 21:2, Deut. 15:12; Jer. 34:9). When debtors became slaves they were identified with their owners but distinguished from them by a label of shame.\footnote{Victor H. Mathews C. Benjamin. Social World of Ancient Israel 1250 – 587 BCE, Handrickson Publishers, Massachusetts, 1993, p. 132.} The reason for this was that they left their own household to work in the household of their creditors. Often slaves too were labelled as ‘strangers’ in Israel (Judg. 19:16).

Israel did not forget that they too started out, in terms of national origin, as a rabble of freed slaves. History of four hundred years of slavery in a foreign land, in an oppressive inhuman and unbearable conditions had not gone out of their memories (Exod. 21-23; Deut. 15:15). The religious laws that forbade Israel from forcing someone else to slavery (Lev. 25:42-55) have softened their stand towards slaves. Slaves were regarded as property and were counted as pure cash (Exod. 21:21). They were transferred by will
at a man's death, like real estate (Lev. 25:46). The owner of the slaves regarded them as investments. The slave was legally a chattel with no human rights. Male and female slaves were mated, not married, and their children were the property of the owner.

Slaves were incorporated into Jewish society. They could be circumcised and allowed to partake of the Passover (Exod. 12:44). They were allowed to join in the feasting and rejoicing of the great festivals (Deut. 16:1-14), and in the weekly Sabbath rest (Exod. 20:10). The socio-cultural inclusion of slaves was extended into the realm of the protection of civil law (21:20f.). There were laws that were meant to protect a slave from bodily harm. After six years of service a slave (Jewish) was to be given the opportunity of freedom in the seventh year. The Old Testament had never seen slavery as sacrosanct. Slavery was seen as a curse and unnatural (Gen. 9:25-27).

3.2.8. STRANGER, FOREIGNER, ALIEN, SOJOURNER

Israel's society was complex. While admitting and tolerating other people into their society, there were different treatments for various categories of people. Israel looked at all those who did not belong to their covenant society as non-Jews. Different terms were used to describe these groups of peoples: a) 'gerim ve toshavim' - strangers and settlers, b) 'ger toshay' - the resident alien; c) 'ezrahim' - homeborn, who had full rights and

---


52. It meant to say that slavery never had any divine sanction nor it was a natural right of the owner (Job 31:15).

53. Ch. J. H. Wright, op. cit., p. 182.
obligations; d) 'nokhrim' - foreigners and sojourners.\(^5^4\) Though these divisions were not absolutely distinct categories they often meant the same.

A. STRANGER: "Stranger" in the Old Testament meant one who was not a member of the Jewish social group. According to the Israelites, 'stranger' was "one who was not a member of the tribe".\(^6^6\) Strangers were of two types: a) any Israelite who was exiled from his home town was called 'geir', 'stranger'. B) any non-Jew who was converted to the faith of Israel was also a stranger but in the sense of a "righteous proselyte.\(^5^6\) The righteous were also called 'geirim' (stranger) since they considered this world insignificant and their dwelling here was only temporary.

B. ALIEN - FOREIGNER: "Alien" was a foreigner who was not a subject of the country in which he/she was. It also meant a foreigner in nature or character.\(^5^7\) "Foreigner" meant one who was not a native. Any non-Israelite having temporary contact with Israel was considered a 'foreigner'.\(^5^8\) The "alien" was a vulnerable foreigner who needed to be protected from all types of oppression. The Old Testament exhibited a paradoxical combination of theoretical hostility (Deut. 7:1-7; 9:1-5; 12:1-3) towards the strangers and practical friendliness and readiness to receive them. In Judaism the foreigner became equivalent to heathen, a worshiper of a false God (2 Macc. 10:2,5). Israelites considered prolonged contact with an alien as religious corruption (Exod. 23:31-33; Is. 2:6-8).


\(^5^8\) Dana M. Pike, "Foreigner", in Harper's Dictionary, Theological Publications in India, Bangalore, 1990, p. 318.
cults brought in by the foreigners were considered idolatrous (1 Kgs. 11:4f.; Jer. 5:19; Jos. 24:23). Sometimes the foreigners were treated as enemies (Obad. 11; Lam. 5:2).

Israel was taught to be sympathetic towards aliens. The category of aliens also included: widows, fatherless and orphans. These subaltern groups were socially and economically weak and dependent. They depended on charity. And the norms of charity were also defined:

You shall not oppress a resident alien; you
know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens
in the land of Egypt (Exod. 23:9).

The treatment to the aliens according to the laws was such, they were given privileges and were obligated to observe the feasts, sacrifices and prohibitions associated with Israel's religion (Exod. 12:49; Lev. 16:29; 17:8-9; 18:26; Num. 15:29). They were identified with the Israelite community after being circumcised (Exod. 12:43-48) and were subject to most of the religious requirements such as the laws of ritual cleanliness (Lev. 17:8-13, Deut. 14:21). If these conditions were fulfilled they were allowed to celebrate even the Passover.

C. SOJOURNERS: "Sojourner" was another term used to designate persons living in a place other than their own home or home country. It also meant a foreigner or an alien. They were also taken into a household. They were the 'people who lived in some ones' 'gates' or 'land' (Deut. 5:14; 14:21, 29; 16:11,14; 24:14). Strangers were the despised ones who were known as the scattered, dispersed, and outcast (30:4; Neh. 1:9; Ps. 147:2). Israel was in 'diaspora' each time they were defeated by foreign rulers.


All the above groups of people were counted as non-Jews by the Israelites. The Old Testament paid attention to these groups of subaltern peoples already in the beginning of the formation of its legislation. The Sabbath command of the Decalogue mention the attention one has to pay to these groups (e.g., aliens) in the land (Exod. 20:22-23,33). According to it one should not mistreat these (above mentioned) subaltern peoples.\(^1\) The covenant laws provided a civic code with religious framework. It was in this context, that the law prohibited the oppression of the alien (Exod. 22:20; 23:9). One of the element that guided the formulation of the law prohibited the oppression of (disadvantaged) alien was their own subaltern experience:

You shall not wrong or oppress the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt (Exod. 22:21).

However, it is worth noting here that these rules were not always adhered to seriously (1 Chr. 22:2; 2 Chr. 2:17). There were instances of ill-treating foreigners, especially those who were weak.

3.2.9. CAPTIVES

Captives were those who were taken prisoners in battle. For Israel Egypt was the real captivity though they were more of slaves than captives. Captivity, according to Jewish thought, was seen as a chastisement or punishment. As one can imagine the captives were never treated well by the captors. Many were put to death (2 Sam. 8:7; see Judg. 8:7). The women and children were brutally slain (2 Kgs. 8:12; 15:16; Amos 1:3). They were taken as booty along with cattle and other possessions (Deut. 20:10). The inhabitants of the cities of the enemy were generally bound in fetters, and marched off to slavery or forced labour. Women, though left unfettered, sometimes were subject to

\(^1\) Ibid, p. 43.
physical violence including rape (Nah. 3:5). There were instances in Israel's captivity history, of restoring the captives, especially by the Assyrians and Babylonians (2 Kgs. 17:24; 24:12-16; 25:11-12), but it was only a small consolation. The Assyrians made the Jewish captives pull the chariot of the triumphant king. The captive king of Israel was humiliated to the limit (Ezek. 19:9). Captives were also flayed and their skins stretched out on the walls of the city.

Captivity, for Jews, meant being lead to exile. Exile to Israel was an act of detaching themselves from their land. It destroyed their spirit of resistance. It meant the suppression of their national identity. The captives often included the people who were capable of resisting, like: landowners, leaders and influential people. But it was not the case with all. The peasant population was often left to remain on its soil. Sometimes only the poorest were left out. The experience of the captivity was at the centre of Israelite life and national and religious consciousness in foreign land. They were encouraged to accept the exile as the will of Yahweh (Jer. 29:4f.).

3.2.10. WOMEN

Women, in most of human societies received lesser importance than men. The biblical world undoubtedly was an androcentric one. In the Jewish social system, women, to some extent, were either aliens or transients within their family of residence. Most of the texts of the Old Testament which mention women, present them in their ordinary capacities as wife, mother or mistress of the house. Still worse, it used a defamatory language that narrated women as the property of men: her father gave her to be a wife of another man, her husband could easily divorce her..(Gen.2:24-25,3:8;4:1,7).


The social institutions of the Jewish society treated women, essentially, in the context of conjugal, maternal and domestic relations. The creation account lays the foundation for this secondary treatment of woman (1:27-31 and 2:18-25). Woman was a helper, born to suffer and the man can dominate over her were some of the ideas that the above texts convey. Women were upheld as the honour of their household only because of their virtues of fidelity, sexual behaviour or their ability to bear children. They enjoyed less freedom. Women who could not bear children had to live a traumatic life. There were women who were not only out of the house but were without a household. Such women did not belong to any social class. They were liminal. The status of women in Jewish society was determined almost completely by the value placed upon them by their husbands and sons. Women had no place in the worship of the covenant community but were responsible equally with men for keeping the law and maintaining the purity of the culture.

The Old Testament did not hesitate to praise women for their traditional roles but correlatively, to berate those who do not live up to their roles such as: beautiful (Eccl. 9:1-9), wicked, domineering, garrulous and idle (Prov. 25:13-26), provocative (26:10). Women were subjected to the authority of men. Their worth, as also their honour, depended on bearing children (Deut. 25:5-10). Levirate marriages were allowed (Gen. 24:60; Lev 19:3). Childlessness was a curse (Gen. 29: 21-30). Women were excluded from all cultic business (1 Sam. 1:3f.).

The Old Testament formulated harsh rules for the woman in the area of marriage. The woman was one of her husband's chattels along with his house (Exod. 20:17). Her husband could repudiate her whereas she could not petition her divorce. To

---

64. Victor H. Mathews C. Benjamin, op. cit., p. 133.
give divorce was the prerogative of the husband. The misconduct of a wife was reprimanded much more severely than that of a husband. The woman was treated like a 'perpetual minor'. Laws were made to protect husbands. Women owed sexual exclusivity to their present or future husbands.

The Old Testament Law contained, a lot of anti-feminine oriented rules and norms that kept them under supervision and enslavement. The so called women’s inferiority and submissiveness was not only tolerated but even sanctioned (Gen. 3:16). Women’s legal status was a function of the larger system of social values and needs and it could not be isolated or absolutized. It was generally subordinate to that of males (Exod. 20:3-17; Deut. 16:4). There were some women in Jewish society, from time to time, who played a significant roles such as: patrons, guardians of holiness, formators of Judaism and as religious leaders and even as prophetesses. For example, Miriam (Exod. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4); Huldah the prophetess (2 Kgs. 22:14-20) and other women like Esther, Judith, Jezebel, were some of them.

But we should make it clear that these few instances do not represent the whole of the world of women in Jewish society. Women were projected as though enjoying with men in many legal duties and privileges. It was far from being true. Women were disqualified to act as witnesses in most cases of criminal and civil law but their testimony was accepted only in questions of religious law. Women who were marginalized and ill-

67. Ibid, p. 93.


70. Peter J. Hass, Recovering The Role of Women, Scholar Press, Atlanta, 1992, pp. 7-84.

treated come under the groups of subaltern peoples. The social reforms introduced by the prophets like Amos, Hosea and others did not bring much transformation in the plight of women.

3.2.10.1. WIDOWS

The idea of an independent woman is a modern phenomenon. In ancient society the independent woman did not exist. She was a member of a family and dependent either upon her father or upon her husband. The position of a widow was much more difficult. The Hebrew word 'almanah' for widow, did not exactly mean as English word, widow. It did not simply denote a woman whose husband was dead but, rather, a once married woman who had no means of financial support and was therefore in need of special legal protection.\(^72\) A widow wore clothes to designate her condition (Gen. 38:14,19). She could not inherit anything from her husband and was part of the household of her eldest son. If she was childless she returned to her father's house (38:11; Lev. 22:13; Rt. 1:8).\(^73\) Sometimes she was made to depend upon the public charity in her poverty and thus became very vulnerable and easily exploited.\(^74\) In fact, widowhood was perceived to be a curse.

The widow who had no man to defend her rights was an obvious victim for the exaction of a creditor (2 Kgs. 4:1f.), and for any type of oppression (Job 22:9; 24:21; Ezek. 22:7). The widows struggled to retain endowments of land. She had no defender at law and so depended on the mercy of dishonest judges (Is. 1:23; 10:2). The Jewish law provided protection to widows by prohibiting wrong doings upon them (Exod. 22:22; Deut. 24:17), including a curse upon injustices (27:19). But such laws were more often ignored


than practiced. Therefore, the widow's resource was not power or property but legal persistence.

The prophets included the oppression of widows in the crimes that they charged the Israelites with (Is. 1:17; Jer. 7:6; Zech. 7:10). Yahweh was the protector of widows (Mal. 3:5). God's concern for the plight of the widows was revealed in the Law and the teaching of the Prophets (Deut. 14:29; Jer. 49:11; Pss. 68:5; 146:9). The neglect or oppression of the widow provoked divine wrath. Yahweh recompensed the oppressor. Widows were among those who enjoyed special care and favour from Yahweh (Exod. 22:21-24; Deut. 10:18).

3.2.10.2. HARLOTS

The Old Testament makes a number of allusions to prostitution and to the houses of prostitution. In normal understanding prostitution referred to female prostitutes. It meant an extra-marital sexual relations for commercial purposes (Gen. 38:17; Prov. 6:26). In Ancient Israel unmarried harlots were generally tolerated, though not socially accepted. They had legal rights (1 Kgs. 3:16-22). But social (Judg. 11:1-3) and religious (Deut. 23.2) biases existed against their children. Harlots were classed with tax-collectors (Mt. 21:32) and were anathema to society.

The prostitutes in Israel were considered as 'under-class'. The whole business of prostitution was considered as evil. Strict rules were imposed against prostitution. Priests were forbidden to marry harlots and Israelites were instructed not to make their

---


daughters harlots (Lev. 21:7; 19:29) and it was a grave offense to family honour (Gen. 34:31). A daughter of a priest who became harlot had to be burnt to death (Lev. 21:9). The payment that a prostitute received was considered a price of a dog and could not be used to fulfill any vow (Deut. 23:18). Permitting the wives to become harlots was considered a tragedy of destruction (Amos 7:17). Strong warnings were issued against the practice (Prov. 23:27-28; 29:3). Prophet Hosea condemned the double standards that called for punishing the harlots while tolerating men who visited them (4.14). The Old Testament referred to sacred prostitutes as 'quedesah' in Hebrew. They were part of the fertility cult (Judg. 8:33; Ezek.16). There were also prostitutes, like, Tamar, Rehab, who were lauded for their role in saving Israel in distress.

"Israel" too was considered a harlot in her faithlessness (Jer. 5:7). The infidelity of Israel to Yahweh was called prostitution on a number of occasions by the prophets (Is. 1:21; 57:7-13; Jer. 2:20; 3:14; Ezek. 16 and 23; Hos. 1-3). The bond between Israel and Yahweh was seen as an union of love. Therefore the breaking of this union was adultery. Besides the religious norms, certain social implications too made Israel to treat prostitution as evil. It affected the paternity of the children of the prostitutes. The dichotomy between the consciousness of evil effects of prostitution and the non condemnation of the prostitution in reality worsened the social and moral conditions of life in Israel community. Prostitutes were the property of everybody but nobody really owned them. It was a miserable life consisting of hatred, humiliation and helplessness. They were alienated subaltern peoples of society.

3.2.11. DISADVANTAGED PEOPLES

Besides the above mentioned larger groups of subaltern peoples there were also other groups who suffered alienation and marginalization. They could be classified into


different categories, such as lower groups, disadvantaged groups, the halalah and the periphery groups.

The lower classes include: mercenaries, military settlers, slaves, agricultural workers and craftsmen. The lower classes also include: proletarized priests, unpropertied peasants, and dregs of the new urban population. Jewish wage earners and leaseholders were dependent on Greek landlords and employers. Jewish slaves were sold to Greece and Aegean regions. The mercenaries, slaves, peasants, craftsmen and merchants who belonged to the lower classes of Palestinian society were governed by the Roman or the Greek law than by the Jewish law.

The disadvantaged groups included: the sick, the crippled, the blind, the lame and the demon possessed. Any physical infirmity was considered as a divine judgement for one’s sinfulness.

Cultural and technological growth has the advantage of discovering new ways and better means of living but it also becomes a curse to society. The result of one such change in Jewish society was the existence of “halalah” (illegitimate Israelites) in Palestinian society. Halalhs, were the ones who were profaned. Some of the

---


82. The disadvantaged groups are also part of the subaltern peoples. While the word "subaltern" is taken as a technical term, the word “disadvantaged” could be taken as descriptive.


illegitimate children of Israel were the children of priests, proselytes, and freed slaves, bastard, Temple slaves, fatherless, foundlings and eunuchs. They often lived as though they were living in a no-mans land. They were Israelites but could not really claim their origin in the pure society.

3.2.11.1. ORPHANS

Orphans was another vulnerable subalterm group along with those of widows and aliens in Jewish society. The orphan was the one whose parents were no more or could not be traced. The Old Testament took note of the plight of orphans. The meaning of the word 'Yatom', 'orphan', referred to the social treatment of the orphans, tragedy of their plight and their emotional vulnerability. In the Old Testament usage different explanations existed regarding the meaning of orphan. The word "orphan" did not imply that both father and mother of the child were dead (Job 24:9). ‘Orphan’ meant fatherless. Orphans were often listed along with widows suggesting that all members of their family were dead. The illegitimate children too were called orphans. They wandered about and begged and were helpless (Ps. 109:9-10).

The life conditions of orphans were very poor (1 Kgs. 17: 8-24; 2 Kgs. 4:1-7; Lam. 5:1-5). They were exploited by society. The exploitation of them was considered a wicked thing by the law (Deut. 27:19). The Mosaic Law took note of their plight and pronounced guidelines for the welfare of the orphans (Exod. 22:22; Num. 27:7-11; Deut. 24:17). The special tithe of the third year was designated for the aid of the widow, the orphan and the sojourner (Deut. 14:29; 26:12-13). The prophets often appealed for better treatment


86. Ibid, p. 342.


of the orphans (Is. 1:17.23; 10:2; Jer. 5:28). God himself came forward to be their protector (Ps. 10:14; Prov. 23:10-11). He executed justice for the orphans (Deut. 10:18; Hos. 14:6). The call for repentance and moral renewal according to the prophets included care for the orphans (Is. 1:17; Jer. 7:6; 22:3; Zech. 7:10).

3.2.11.2. PROSELYTES

The word "proselyte", literally means "new comer". It was used for non-Jew who was converted to Judaism. The Jews were not too zealous to make proselytes and regarded them some times as superior to the natives. In the Rabbinic literature the term for a convert, proselyte, was 'ger' which means one who was a sojourner, one who came to live in the country for a while. A 'ger' was one who accepted Judaism without qualifications.

Proselytes were Israelites, but with a blemish. Proselytes were the ones who were converted to Judaism. They were the ones who had been circumcised and received into Jewish religion. Their entry into Jewish religion had given them the right to offer sacrifice. Most of the proselytes came from regions near the boundaries of Jewish territory. Though proselytes were received in Judaism they were not accorded the same rights as full Israelites:

There shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you (Exod. 12:49).

99. Ibid.
100. Solomon Zeitlin's, op. cit., 407-417.
102. Ibid, p. 320.
They were merely bound by the law of Israel but the legal status they accorded was that of a 'stranger'. They were considered as 'heathen' meaning 'people', and not true Israelites.

The judgements on proselytes were either harsh or biased. Female proselytes were treated as unfit for marriage with priests, with the reason that they might have been prostitutes earlier. But they could marry from other groups. They also were subjected to limitations in the right of succession. The proselytes were forbidden to hold office in the Sanhedrin and the twenty three members tribunal which tried capital crimes. When there was a proselyte member in the tribunal, the decision of such tribunal was considered invalid. They were deprived of the participation in the vicarious benefits of Abraham.

The marginalised proselytes, however, had the share of concern and charity both from the law and the public. The needy proselyte had access: to the poor man's share at harvest time (Lev. 19:10; 23:22); to glean the field (23:22) and the vine and to take the forgotten sheaf (Deut. 24:19). The proselyte was taken into consideration when the poor man's tithe was distributed. The proselyte had a right to public assistance. But most of the proselytes suffered not only from economic poverty but also from social identity.

By rule they fully belonged to the Jewish religion because of their conversion, manifested in circumcision; but in practice they were treated as illegitimate. In some quarters, the Proselytes were considered on a par with the native Jews. But they did not enjoy the same rights as an Israelite did, but they were merely bound, like all Jews, to

93. Ibid, p. 323.
95. They include: privilege of being chosen directly by God. Direct relationship with God. Privileged place in the presence of God. Blessings and promises.
observe the whole Law (Exod. 12:49; Gal 5:3). The rabbinic attitude towards this subaltern group was very pessimistic. The social position of these people was lowered and they were deprived of civil rights. The children of proselytes were equated with the poor of Israel. This, however, had a redeeming feature in that they were entitled for charity (Lev. 19:10; 23:32; Deut. 24:21; 14:29; 26:12), and public assistance. But it was only a little consolation to the multi faceted sufferings of subaltern proselytes. Jesus denounced the harassment of the proselytes by the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mt. 23:15).

3.2.1.3. GOD-FEARERS

Among the proselytes there were two groups. One was proselytes and the other “God-fearers”. The Proselytes were subjected to three requirements. Namely, circumcision, baptism and an offering at the temple. Among these three, the obligations of circumcision became painful to some Romans and Greeks. Hence many men backed out and there were more women than men among the proselytes. This problem was solved when the non-Jews were joined Jewish religion without the stigma of circumcision. These were the second group of proselytes known as “God-fearers” (phoboumenoi - Acts 10:2, 22, 35; 13:6,26) or “worshippers” of God (sebomenoi - 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7). The wives and children of ‘God-fearers’ became full Proselytes. The God-fearers accepted the moral teaching and religious practices of Judaism, without the practice of circumcision. The minimum requirement of God-fearers, if not the law of Moses, was at least the observance of the commandments given to Noah, namely, abstention from pollution of idols, from unchastity, and from what is strangle from blood (15:19-20; 28:29).

3.2.1.4. FREED SLAVES

One of the groups that was included among the illegitimate Israelites (halalah) was the group of freed slaves. They were men and women of Gentile birth. They passed

from the state of bonded slaves into the service of a Jew by the time of first century BC. They were incorporated into the society as they accepted circumcision and later on were freed. As former slaves they remained in relationship with their previous owners in which there were mutual responsibilities. Circumstances determined whether the freed slave remained in the household of his former owner with responsibility for part of its works or went into the world to conduct a business under a financial arrangement with his previous master. In Rome freed slaves had citizenship. Their chances of freedom was however very few. These people had a double stigma. Besides being illegitimate Israelites, they had the stigma of being former slaves. This stigma was all the more a heavy burden for the female freed slave as it meant that she had to be a harlot. Every female freed slave, ipso facto was called a harlot. This was one of the lowest groups of Israelite society.

3.2.11.5. MAMZERIMS

"Mamzerim" is a Hebrew term for 'Bastard'. Bastards were the offspring from any union of near kin which was forbidden according to Jewish law. Another definition of bastards were "the children born from the union of all offsprings forbidden in the Torah, namely from incest or adultery". According to another definition 'bastards' were those children who were born of a union which, according to Torah, was punishable by death. The Law forbade illegitimate (eruvot) union between a priest and a widow, and the children of such union were considered mamzerim. The members of a bastard's family were not allowed to marry not only from the Levite, the legitimate Israelite, but also


100. The rules regarding the mamzerim were strict. The offspring of an unmarried woman was not a mamzer. Mamzer applied also to union between brother and sister or between a man or a woman validly married to another at the same time. A marriage between two mamzerim was permitted and so between a mamzerim and proselyte was valid. See Isaac Landman, General editor. "Mamzerim" in The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, vol.7, Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Co. INC., New York, 1942, P.309.
from illegitimate descendants of the families of the priests (Deut. 23:2-3). Bastards were forbidden to enter into the assembly of the Lord, even to the tenth generation (23:3). They could marry only into the families of the proselytes. This group too was deprived of the right of inheritance and succession. But some Jewish writers present a positive picture of the mamzerim. They argue that except with regard to marriage, the personal status of a mamzer did not prejudice the bastards in any way.

3.2.11.6. EUNUCHS

A eunuch was a castrated male and did not behave as a normal human person. As Israel considered the cult of eunuchism as impure they separated themselves from the fertility cult practices of Egyptians. Israelites considered castrating oneself for the deity as immoral and illegal. The presence of eunuchs was very much felt in Jewish society. In Israel eunuchs were appointed as servants and managers of the palace, particularly of the harem. They served as “courtier” or “officer” in ancient monarchies (Gen. 37:36, 39:1; 40:2; Dan. 1:3). The captives sometimes were made eunuchs.

The code of Deuteronomy prohibited the eunuchs from becoming members of the Israelite community (Deut. 23: 2). They were barred from entry to the assembly of the Lord (23:1), because they were impaired and defective persons (Lev. 22:24; Deut.23:1). They were not allowed to marry within Israel’s community, not even from levirate marriage. But when one was a eunuch by birth (due to malformation), he had less harsh treatment. He could avail himself of the privileges of society. Eunuchs were not permitted to become members of the Sanhedrin nor of criminal courts like the proselytes (who were


They were also included in the category of racial blemish. They were marked as a caste outside the law.

It was only during the later part of Jewish history that eunuchs were permitted to have economic and social comforts. They find place in the list of the poor of Yahweh. According to prophet Isaiah, eunuchs who had been excluded and cast out would find a place in God's salvation.

3.2.12. JEWS OF DIASPORA

The Greek term "diaspora" means 'dispersion'. It was a technical term used for Jewish communities settled outside Palestine during the last century BC and the 1st century AD. Diaspora was as old as 8th cent. BC. Alexander's conquest entailed that many non-Jews settled in Palestine, while at the same time many Jews abandoned Palestine and settled far from home. The Diaspora Jews lost their identity and were absorbed by the surrounding population. They were immigrants in foreign countries. Most of the Diaspora Jews were merchants and craftsmen and so belonged to upper economic levels. But there were also Jews in the diaspora who declined to lower the social status of farmers. In Roman and Asia minor cities, Jewish immigrants were preferred to others because of their sobriety, industry, and astuteness.

Though the Jews were in the diaspora they always longed to come back to their native land. They considered Jerusalem as their spiritual capital and looked to it for religious leadership. They did not enjoy good relations with their natives. This often gave rise to anti-Semitism and eventual persecution of Jews in diaspora. They often

---


encountered the problem of citizenship. The diaspora Jews accepted Good News more readily than the Palestinian Jews. The Jews of the diaspora longed to be counted as the true sons of Abraham, the pride for any Jew. Jesus came to grant that pride to them.

3.2.13. CONCLUSION

The groups of the subaltern peoples of the Old Testament is more than we have listed. As we pointed in the beginning of this section we have only highlighted a few groups of subaltern people to mark the plight of such similar groups. Often these groups are classified as poor by the scholars. But the term ‘poor’ is ambiguous as it refers, in the first place mostly, to economic poverty. But the groups of suffering ‘poor’ is wider and broader than economic poverty. The term ‘poor’ should be replaced, as we have explained, by term the ‘subaltern’ which is a more inclusive term. The Old Testament scriptures do show that God of poor is also God of subaltern peoples. It is this element that shows the God of the Bible is also God of the subaltern peoples. The subaltern groups of the Old Testament we have seen do not represent all the groups. These groups of subaltern people we have seen gives an idea of the plight of the rest of the groups too. Bible does not only feature the Sitz im Leben of the subaltern peoples but also seeks their liberation. We shall study about it in the next part when we articulate the social justice of the Old Testament.


PART THREE: SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

3.3.0. INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic, political and religious background that we have studied concerning the subaltern peoples of the Old Testament paved the way to study them in a particular perspective. This perspective helped us to discover their plight of marginalization, alienation and dehumanization. Yahweh's response to the cries of the subaltern peoples was presented through various ways and in different times. We shall in this part try to recapitulate this response to the sufferings of subaltern peoples of the Old Testament under the theme of social justice.

The meaning of social justice in the Old Testament could be understood only as God's saving act. The foundation for Social Justice was already laid down with the Covenant of Sinai:

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a Priestly kingdom and a holy nation...

(Exod. 19:4-6).

With the saving event of Sinai, Yahweh took upon Himself the responsibility of doing justice to His people.\(^1\) Justice has two dimensions: One, theocentric, God provides justice and second, androcentric, human persons act according to justice. The concrete way of acting according to justice was to follow the Ten Commandments (Exod. Chap. 20) which imply obeying God's Laws and in other ways imitating divine quality of justice, namely, preferential option for the suffering subaltern peoples.

3.3.1. MEANING OF JUSTICE

The Hebrew word 'mispat', translated as 'justice' means 'to rule', 'to govern', 'to judge', 'to command', etc. The two main biblical terms for 'justice' "tsedek and tsedekah" refer to both divine and human justice. The word 'justice' calls to mind a juridical order in which a judge dispenses justice by enforcing observance of custom or law. The meaning of justice denotes God's merciful acts. Israel regarded God as the judge of the whole earth. God's universal judgement was based on the fact that he created the whole world and established equity and justice.

Justice was central to Israel's religious language. Jews understood God as the embodiment of the universal principle of justice. Justice meant expressing fidelity to the Law (of God), which was inscribed in the divine precepts (Gen. 7:1; 18:17f.; Ezek. 3:16-21; 18:5-24; Prov. 11:4f.; 12:28). These laws at later stage were translated into wisdom sayings. Justice meant wisdom. Wisdom governed the dealings of human persons (Jb.8:3; Sir.38:33) in Jewish Society. Such dealings manifested justice. Justice was also seen as a moral value both historically and conceptually. Historically it began with the call to be just:

Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue
so that you may live and occupy the land that
the Lord your God is giving you (Deut. 16:20).

---


Conceptually it held a central place in the Jewish world view. Many other basic Jewish concepts resolved around the notion of Justice.  

God’s primary attribute of action, was justice (Gen.18.25; Ps.9:5). His Commandments to Israel were essentially for the purpose of establishment of justice in the world (119:137-144). The act of delivering justice in the Bible, presupposes the recognition of injustices inherent in both divine and human justice. As far as divine justice was concerned, the implacability of God’s wrath and the inescapability of His judgement put humans in tight situation in the sense that it was an inescapable divine justice. But from the point of humans, the justice should expose the irrelevance of human peculiarities and idiosyncrasies that give divine retaliation for the semblance of injustice. With regard to human justice, the justice of talon was apparent rather than real, semantic rather than substantive, natural without endangering life. These were cogent enough indications of blatant injustices.

3.3.2. JUSTICE OF GOD

Justice, according to the understanding of Israel was to establish God’s order, the order of the Creation. God’s justice was not just to dispense justice but to love the subaltern person:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing
(Deut.10:17-18).


God promised to commit himself to his people "in justice and judgement, in mercy and tenderness" (Hos. 2:21). His justice was founded on his holiness, filled with his promise of security in the land. It was in justice that he granted life (Pss. 119:40; 106; 123); mercy and grace (Is. 45:19; Ps. 103:17f.). Justice was the sign of forgiveness of sin (Ps. 51:16; Dan. 9:16). The covenant that God made with his people contained the manifestation of God's justice.

The covenantal justice was both spiritual and social. Israel's leaders and elders who were engaged in social justice guided the covenantal spiritual justice. For Israel's leader, especially for the king, to do justice was the hallmark of his vocation. The king was accountable to the standard of God's justice (Jer. 22:1-17; Ezek. 45:9). Social justice was Yahweh's way for Israel. The law of kings, too, was subordinate to the concept of the covenant and thus to the social life of the people. The real strength of the ruler consisted in loving justice (Ps. 99:4) in crushing the oppressors and rescuing the children of the poor (72:4). Thus any judge or king who deviated from the plumb line of justice defiled the land, profaned the Holy Name and brought misery (exile) to Israel. Doing justice meant shielding God's image (Exod. 21:17f.). It was foolishness not to know justice, and to ignore wisdom which will bring devastating judgement (Prov. 29:2,4). Scriptures hastened to note that justice was the responsibility of all in the covenant community. To do justice was to walk with God and display the same steadfast covenant love (Mic. 6:8).

3.3.3. ACTS OF JUSTICE

Acts of Justice were to be expressed in love of neighbour (Lev. 19:18). Acts of justice ensure social protection of the subaltern peoples like: widows, waifs (homeless


person), servants, workers, and sick persons. To do justice meant to vindicate the cause of the poor and the oppressed by heeding their cry (Jb. 29:12; Ps. 18:6), knowing their rights, and being their help (29:15-17; Prov. 29:7), to deal fairly in the market places (Deut. 24:10-13), to show an impartiality by not favoring the rich, and to care for the hungry, thirsty, and naked. Failure to do justice would blindfold the people to the merciful justice of God's salvation (Is. 59:4, 9-11; Prov. 21:13). Those who were unjustly treated by others, in social, economic and political relationships, could summon God to do justice by saving them from their enemies or oppressors (Ps. 7:6-11).

God did not want just the acts of pity but practice of justice and righteousness (Amos 5:21-24). God was just, for he executed justice for the poor and the oppressed (Deut. 10:18; Pss. 103:6; 146:7), and brought salvation and restoration to Israel (Neh. 9:33). God's justice was also an object of hope.

3.3.4. JUSTICE AND LAW

When the laws were given, God made special provisions for specific concerns of the poor, the subaltern (Exod. 23:6; Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 15:11; Prov. 22:22-23; Is. 25:4). The poor are the friends of Yahweh (Ps. 86:1f.). The regulation of Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee were intended to prevent any person from oppressing or taking advantage over the poor. The responsibility of redressing the plight of the poor was fundamental to biblical faith. The God of Israel was one who heard the cries of the poor (Ps. 12:5). The Exodus event was a great example of God's deliverance of the poor (Exod. 2:23-24). In the Law, attention was given to the social structures that affected the poor. The land was to be left fallow every seventh year. The empowering the poor with proscription of interest on loans was intended to relieve the distress of the recipient. A collateral (pledge) was prohibited that would weaken the debtor (Deut. 24:6).

The Old Testament portrayed God as the one who was specially concerned with the poor, particularly the subaltern peoples: the widow, the fatherless, and the oppressed (Ps. 10:17-18; 82:1-8; 109:16). When the poor pleaded for justice it was not just for spiritual mercy but for ownership of land and property, for freedom and security which constituted their in-alienable human rights endowed upon them by God, their Creator.\textsuperscript{15}

3.3.5. JUSTICE IN THE TIMES OF THE PROPHETS

The covenantal justice of early Israel was advocated by the prophets throughout history. From the time of Moses, the prophets served as messengers, sent by Yahweh, to bring his word to Israel. The Hebrew word \textit{’nabi} meaning prophet, meant same as \textit{one who was sent}. The prophet was not so much \textit{`foreteller'} but was the one who had divine message to announce and proclaim publicly.\textsuperscript{16} The prophet was one who had seen and experienced the life struggles of the subaltern peoples.

The prophets exercised considerable freedom in interpreting Yahweh's commands (Ezek. 24:15; Jer. 24; Amos 4:1f.; 6:1f.). They believed that Yahweh was accompanying Israel along the road of their history. Their message was not only on eschatological events but communicated in actuality something that was going to happen soon.\textsuperscript{17} From the point of the people's expectations their interventions in history was to bring justice and equality in society. In this mission they did not spare any one who was guilty of exploiting and oppressing the subaltern peoples. Not all prophets accepted the ritualistic segregation.\textsuperscript{18} For the prophets like Isaiah, Amos and Micah, justice was not just between righteous and evil but between the oppressor and the oppressed. They reproached rich

\textsuperscript{15}. Temba L. J. Maficao, op. cit., p. 1128.


landlords and powerful ministers. Thus prophecy worked for critical and profound social changes and for abolition of class divisions: freemen and slaves, rich and poor peasants that characterized Israelite society under the late monarchy.\textsuperscript{19}

The prophets 'blushed' over the crimes of the rich (Amos 2:6f.; 4:1; 5:11). They denounced the highway robbery (Exod. 22:29) and shameless frauds in land grabbing (Amos 8:5f.; Hos. 12:8; Mic. 2:2; Is. 5:8), the enslavement of the little ones (Jer. 34:8-22), the abuse of power and perversion of justice itself (Amos 5:7; Is. 10:1f.; Jer. 22:13-17). The Yahweh's poor merited his mercy and they were the objects of his love (Ps.74:19; Is.49:13; 66:2-4).

The activity of the prophets projected a specific option towards the subaltern suffering people. All the prophets preached against debt, slavery, the pawning of clothes and against all violations of the charity commandments which benefited the poor.\textsuperscript{20} They sided with the subaltern peoples of society.

Isaiah was one of the prophet, who directed the bitterest attack against Israel's ruling classes for their injustices against the subaltern peoples. According to him the roots of social injustices among Israelites in general consisted of: a) false alliance (land was subjected to foreign rulers like Assyrians, Is. 2:7,16.); b) false religion - apostasy from Yahweh's law; and c) false individualism.\textsuperscript{21} According to Isaiah, the social sins of Judah, in particular, included: superstition (2:6); idolatry (2:8); luxurious lives of (royal) women (3:16f.); idle dissipation (5:8-10); greed (10:1f.). These sins had hardened the hearts to the cries and sorrows of the poor subaltern peoples. He denounced the practice of possession by force (58:4). The poorer stratum of population suffered most as often they were brought to court regardless of their rights (Is. 29:17-24). According to him, social justice


\textsuperscript{20}. Max Weber, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 279.

included the removal of moral evil. Moral evil was not only the sin of individuals but the sin of the whole class of people. It was an offence for which the entire nation was judged. The oppressor was destroyed (3:12). The justice for Isaiah was established in and through Messiah who came out of the root of Jesse (11:1). In his kingdom the rich were humbled and the poor favoured.

The prophetic task involved freeing not only the oppressed but also the oppressors. In this sense Moses’ model became a paradigm. Moses freed the oppressed Israel from the oppression of Egyptians. A vision of social justice would be inadequate if it did not ultimately seek to eradicate oppression by freeing the sources of oppression. This implied not only provocation of indignation and anger, but also dialogue and consciousness raising. The vision of the prophet had to be one of faith that transcended the blueprint of annihilation. He must have the vision of God and hence of humanity, whereby the lust for power and wealth was made subservient to justice and peace. For, God was active in history of his people.

The history of God's activity was not a neutral state of affair but a stage where his preferential option for the marginalized was revealed and realized. This activity of God revealed that he was liberator and savior.

3.3.6. SABBATH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

There were a number of regulations that aimed at social justice in the Old Testament. The observance of the Sabbath was one of them. The seventh day of the week, observed as a day of rest in Israel and the Jewish religion since the earliest times, was called the Sabbath day. It was intended to reinforce the provisions of Sabbath as a

day of rest. It was observed as a memorial of God's resting from the work of creation (Gen. 2:1-3). Thus Sabbath celebrates creation and imposes itself on the social order because it marks the end of bearing burdens:

"The Sabbath celebrates creation. Israel rests on that day from its very day labour of creation. Because God rested on that day in creating the world; Israel rests on that day to remember that to be reminded that slave is not a slave. In both aspects, the Sabbath imposes itself upon the social order. The defining moment of society, in particular a social order that organizes itself around the days of the week". 27

The Hebrew word 'sabat', which was transliterated into Greek as 'sabbaton' and into English as 'Sabbath' means 'to stop' or 'to cease'. It was marked by cessation of work to give attention to religious ceremonial observances. It was a day of rest not only for the Israelites from work but also for their animals and slaves (Exod. 23:12; 34:12). The idea behind this notion was that the Israelites themselves were once slaves under Egyptians and therefore should have compassion on the forced labourers (Deut. 5:15). 28 This gives an indication of how justice was oriented in the understanding of Sabbath. Though it had religious motivation of sanctification (Lev. 23:3), it also had an humanitarian motive. It was both a sign of and a time for remembering the distinct relationship between God and His people (Exod.31:13; Ezek. 20:20).

3.3.6.1. SABBATICAL YEAR

Another observance that followed the rule of Sabbath was the "Sabbatical Year". The Sabbatical Year was marked by three justice-oriented activities: a) Fallow year for


the Lord, b) **Release of debts or pledges**, c) **Release of slaves**. The biblical basis for the Sabbatical Year was the prescription that every seventh year the land must lie uncultivated, **based on the assumption** that the land belonged to God and that it did not belong to anyone to be disposed at will.\(^9\) The fruit that grows on its own in the Sabbatical Year was to be left for the poor and the wild animals (Exod. 23: 10-11; Lev. 25:1-7). It also instructed that "every creditor shall release what he had lent to his neighbour" (Deut. 15:2). This remission of debts was designed to provide the means to correct social inequalities.

The beneficiaries of the Sabbatical Year included: slaves, aliens, non-Israelites, residential labourers. **Theologically**, the Sabbatical Year signifies: 1) **God's Lordship**, 2) **God's ownership of the Land**, 3) **Humanitarian ethics** and 4) **Eschatological Hope**.\(^30\) The concepts of both the Sabbath and the Sabbatical Year may have in the first place religious connotation but they also projected God’s justice which was an important foundation for social justice in Israel's society.

### 3.3.7. JUBILEE YEAR

The constant impulse towards social justice in the Old Testament materialized further in the formulation of another ordinance, namely, the Jubilee Year. The Jubilee Year comes in fiftieth year occurring at the end of seven Sabbatical cycles of seven years. The Jubilee Year was proclaimed with the blowing of the `**shophar**` (trumpet made from a ram's horn) on the day of atonement. Thus the word 'jubilee' takes its root from Hebrew word "**yobel**" meaning "horn". It was called Jubilee Year because it's opening was announced by the sound of trumpet.\(^31\)


\(^{31}\) Ibid, p. 175.
The purpose of these laws was to give an exclusive attention to the improvement of the economic conditions of the subaltern peoples. We have already enumerated some of these groups in the previous part of this chapter. The declaration of the above two particular laws (Sabbatical and Jubilee laws) were part of the justice and social equality programme for liberation of the subaltern peoples. The aim of the Jubilee Year was to maintain the socio-economic basis of the nation's covenant relationship.

The proclamation of the Jubilee Year had implications for Israelite society in the areas of land tenure and human servitude.\textsuperscript{32} Like the Sabbatical Year, the Jubilee Year too specified the measures to be taken to liberate the poor slave (Deut. 15:1-18).\textsuperscript{33} In this year all land was returned to its ancestral owners and all Israelite slaves were freed (Lev. 25:8-17, 23-55; 27:16-25 and Num. 36:4).\textsuperscript{34} It was also an economic institution which concerned itself with the family and the land. The land in the Jubilee Year was rather leased than sold. The idea implied therefore, was that the land had to be shared equally among all. It implied that the monopoly of the land in the hands of a few was against the law of justice of Israel.\textsuperscript{35} The Jubilee Year also marked the dedication of a field to the sanctuary of the Lord (Lev. 27:25). To redeem it, the owner had to pay an additional fifth of the value of the field. When the field was unredeemed or sold to someone else it became the possession of the sanctuary priest upon the Jubilee Year. The Jubilee Year also paid attention to the slaves. When poverty forced an Israelite to sell himself to the service of his country men, he was to be treated as a hired man and not as a slave (25:40-42). This man had to be released in the Jubilee Year.

The Jubilee Year thus has two major thrusts: release/liberty and return/restoration. These two thrusts highlighted God's preferential love towards the alienated subaltern peoples of Israel's society. The ideas of liberation and redemption reveal the vision of the Servant of Yahweh, the Messiah, that the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed. The

\textsuperscript{32} Allen C. Myers, ed. "Jubilee, year of", op. cit., p. 602.

\textsuperscript{33} Ronald De Vaux, op. cit., p. 173.

\textsuperscript{34} Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Jubilee", in Harper's Bible Dictionary, Theological Publications in India, Bangalore, 1990, pp. 511-512.

\textsuperscript{35} John L. McKenzie, "Jubilee", op. cit., p. 460.
Messiah will deliver the final justice that would establish the eternal Kingdom of God. It was in this Kingdom that the subaltern peoples would find liberation.

3.3.8. EXPECTATIONS OF MESSIAH

In the midst of suffering, the people of Palestine did not lose heart. Their faith in the saving acts of their God made them to look towards the future. It was in this sense that the prophetic teachings on the expectations of the Messiah made sense. The term "Messiah" is the same as "Mashaiah" in Hebrew form and "Messaias" in Greek. Messiah means one who is an 'anointed one'. The duty of the Messiah was to redeem. The concept of the Messiah was as old as the Old Testament. The prophets of the Old Testament implanted this idea in the minds of Israel so deep that it was never lost sight of. One of the constant features of Jewish eschatology was the "birth pangs" of a new age. The Jewish belief in the coming of a new age of peace and justice was firmly rooted in the scriptures (Is. 2; Ezek. 40:1f. Zech. 8:20f. 9:14).

The application of significance of the concept of the Messiah became very vigorous after the Maccabean uprising just before the times of Jesus. It remained fresh in the minds of the people of Palestine also during the time of Jesus. Messianism, for the Jews, represented hope of the eventual deliverance from foreign rule. The Jews of this period cherished the hope that the covenant God would act again in history to restore the fortunes of his internally exiled and marginalised subaltern peoples. The people of Israel hoped and believed that in the Messianic period they would be purified and their original relationship with their God would be restored.

By the time of Roman occupation of Palestine, the focus of Jewish hope had become mainly political. The messianic expectations foretold the political freedom from foreign rule and liberation from the burden of taxation. According to this expectation,

---